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ABSTRACT

Teachers and supervisors need to provide quality experiences in reading for each learner. School systems can appraise the effectiveness of their present reading curricula in a variety of ways. The following issues are involved in evaluating the reading curriculum: (1) objective selection; (2) objective sequencing; and (3) appraisal procedures to ascertain reading progress. Each program objective should be thoroughly assessed. Proper sequencing of objectives is also important. Learning opportunities should be designed to provide diverse experiences in reading through a multi-media approach. Students' achievement in reading can be appraised in several ways. Evaluation procedures can be developed cooperatively with teachers and students, or generated by the reading teacher. (MM)

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EVALUATING THE READING CURRICULUM

Marlow Ediger

Teachers and supervisors need to provide quality experiences in reading for each learner. Students individually must achieve optimally in learning to read. How might a school system appraise the effectiveness of the present reading curriculum?

Evaluation of Objectives

Each objective needs to be assessed thoroughly. The ends need to be vital to guide students to attain as well as possible in word attack skills, comprehension, and work study skills. Word attack objectives include utilizing context, picture, configuration, structural analysis, phonetic, and syllabication clues to unlock unknown words.

To emphasize comprehension objectives, learners should achieve skills in reading to acquire facts, directions, and a sequence of ideas. Also, students need to read critically and creatively, as well as scan vital ideas.

Work study ends might stress the effective use of:

1. dictionaries and encyclopedias.
2. thesaurus and almanacs.
3. multiple series textbooks.
4. glossaries, the index, and table of contents.
5. atlases, maps, globes, and charts.
6. graphs, tables, and figures.

Objectives provide direction in terms of <u>what</u> students are to learn. Balance among understandings (learning facts, concepts, and generalizations), skills (applying what has been learned), and attitudinal (feelings, values, and beliefs) goals need to be stressed in ongoing units of study.

Objectives for student attainment should meet selected criteria. Among other standards, objectives should be:

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1. vital and relevant.

2. purposeful and acceptable for learners.

3. interesting and meaningful.

4. challenging and provide for individual differences.

5. utilitarian and useful in new learning situations.

6. attainable on the part of students.

Issues to consider in the selection of goals in the reading curriculum might be the following:

1. general versus measurably stated.

2. activity centered versus subject matter emphasis.

3. process as compared to product orientated.

4. student centered versus teacher determined.

5. inductive versus deductive emphasis.

6. multi-media versus textbook-workbook emphasis.

Lapp and Flood[1] wrote:

After determining specific behavioral objectives, you need to adjust the program to the students' needs. This can be accomplished through formal and informal assessments of your students. Informal assessment might include an analysis of:

1. the reading levels of the texts to be read
2. which children can easily read the texts; who will require minimal help; and who needs a great deal of help
3. the writing, listening, and speaking skills required to complete each task
4. the types of abilities each child has as they related to each area
5. the content area concepts being explored
6. what the children know about the content areas that are being explored.

Procedures for informal assessment might include: (1) a general class discussion, (2) knowledge from previous assignments, or (3) a game, worksheet, or reading assignment. After determining the relationship between the goals to be accomplished and the skills and information possessed by each child, you can begin to determine basic grouping patterns.

Sequence in Reading

There certainly needs to be an order of inductively and/or deductively

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[1]Diane Lapp and James Flood, Teaching Reading to Every Child. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1978, page 180.

acquiring understands, skills, and attitudinal goals effectively. Which objectives then should be attained first, second, third, and so on? Proper sequencing of objectives is important in that learners need to attain optimally in moving from the simple increasingly to the more complex or from the concrete to the semi-concrete and then to the abstract.

One approach in emphasizing sequence is to have students choose the order of experiences within a flexible environment. Thus, for example, in individualized reading, a learner selects which library books to read sequentially. After reading a book, the student has a conference with the teacher to appraise progress. After the completion of each conference with the teacher, the learner is ready to select the next library book to read. The teacher intervenes in library book selection if the student is unable to choose and complete the reading of a book.

In situations involving individualized reading, the pupil orders his/her own experiences. Sequence, it is felt, resides within the involved learner. Others, the teacher included, cannot select the order of goals for a learner to attain. The student in individualized reading must do the processing of content. A teacher determined reading curriculum does not work, according to advocates of individualized reading. Humanism, as a psychology of learning, strongly advocates concepts such as the following:

1. student-teacher planning of the curriculum.

2. learners choosing from among diverse objectives which to achieve and which to omit.

3. learning centers from which students may sequence their own tasks.

4. students being involved in determining objectives within a contract system.

Veatch[2] wrote:

The difference lies in the instructional role of the teacher. For example, in recreational reading, we find the following:

A weekly or biweekly period
Little or no actual instruction

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[2]Jeanette Veatch, Individualizing Your Reading Program. New York: G. P. Putnams Sons, pages IV and X.

Teacher largely free and inactive once books are chosen
Little attention to skill development
Reading entirely silent

A quite different picture is found in the individualized approach, to wit:

A daily reading period
Continual instruction
Teacher active and in demand
Concern for skill development
Reading silent with frequent opportunities to read orally to the teacher and to the class

As such it has certain prime characteristics that occur regardless of the variations in practice found throughout the country. There are: 1) self-selection of material by pupils for their own instruction, 2) individual conferences between each pupil and teacher, and 3) groups organized for other than reasons of ability or proficiency in reading.

Many teachers confuse an individualized approach and recreational reading because both entail self-selection of books.

Somewhat toward the other end of the continuum, teachers and supervisors might sequence measurably stated objectives for learner attainment. The ends can be announced to students prior to each lesson presentation. The objectives are specific in that the teacher may measure if a learner has or has not been successful in goal attainment.

The teacher also selects learning opportunities in order that students might achieve each objective. The activities must guide students to achieve the announced ends for each lesson. Only those stimuli necessary to attain each objective should be contained in the daily lesson plan. After instruction, the teacher should measure /observe to ascertain if objectives stressed in the lesson have been achieved. Mastery learning is then being emphasized.

Mastery learning advocates stress the significance of:

1. teachers and supervisors deciding upon what (the objectives) pupils are to learn. They also determine sequence for student learning.

2. behaviorally stated objectives and their use. These goals are precise and specific, not general.

3. teachers and supervisors need to choose learning activities and evaluation procedures sequentially. Pupil-teacher planning generally is not advocated.

4. educators in the school setting are in the best position to determine sequence in learning for pupils. Teachers and supervisors possess the education, training, and experience to choose quality ordered goals for students to achieve.

Pertaining to behavioral technology, Woolfolk[3] and Nicolich wrote:

Programmed instruction offers a systematic application of the principles of behavioral learning in which students teach themselves using specially prepared materials. These materials present information broken down into very small steps, require students to actively respond as they read the materials, and present students with immediate feedback. Computers are often used to present very sophisticated programmed instruction as well as to help keep records of student work, present simulation games, and respond to student inquiries.. This use of computers in the classroom is generally described as computer assisted instruction (CAI). Another method making use of behavioral principles is the Keller Plan, or the personalized system of instruction (PSI). In this approach to learning, students read small units, take frequent tests, and receive immediate feedback from proctors.

Issues involved in sequencing objectives include the following:

1. should the pupil be involved in ordering objectives or is the teacher in the best position to sequence ends for learner attainment?

2. does order in learning reside with the pupil or might teachers stimulate a selected sequence within students?

3. would an eclectic approach be best in ordering experiences for students with pupil-teacher planning, as well as teacher determination of ends for learner attainment?

Learning Opportunities

There are numerous activities which may be provided for students. Thus in addition to diverse experiences in reading, the learner may participate in using the following:

1. films, slides, and filmstrips.

2. study prints and illustrations.

3. maps, globes, charts, tables, and graphs.

4. transparencies and the overhead projector.

5. single concept film loops and the opaque projector.

With the utilization of a variety of activities in the reading curriculum, a multi-media approach is in evidence. Diverse media rather then one or a few means are then used to provide learning opportunities for students. A single medium might well involve the use of basal readers in the curriculum. Multi-

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[3]Anita Woolfolk and Lorraine McCune Nicolich, Educational Psychology for Teachers. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1980, page 157.

media. methods emphasize the utilization of the enumerated items above plus the use of diverse types of reading materials, such as textbooks, library books, pamphlets, brochures, and other printed materials.

Learning opportunities selected must:

1. aid in achieving desired objectives.

2. guide each student to attain optimally.

3. provide for each learner's present abilities, needs, and interests.

4. emphasize sequence in terms of pupils experiences.

Why do selected reading specialists emphasize a multi-media approach?

1. provision can then be made for students of diverse levels of capability in learning.

2. diverse learning styles can be provided for when a variety of activities are utilized in teaching and learning.

3. interest in learning may be stimulated within pupils. Each student may find that which is of interest to learn.

4. students may find more purpose in learning for one activity compared to a different media used in learning.

5. experiences for learners may be sequenced most appropriately if students can experience a variety of activities.

Somewhat toward the other end of the continuum, there are reading specialist who emphasize students achieving the basics in the curriculum. Essential learnings need to be acquired rather than frills or fads. Thus, reputable basal readers, as well as related workbooks and worksheets need to be in the offing. With these materials used as learning activities, students acquire basic word recognition skills, such as skill to utilize phonics, syllabication, context clues, structural analysis, as well as abilities to use configuration and picture clues.

With the use of basal materials in reading, students individually may attain reading comprehension skills, such as acquiring facts, directions, sequence of ideas, generalizations, and concepts. Critical and creative reading add to comprehension abilities to be attained by learners.

Each learner needs to attain optimally in a sequential manner when utilizing

basal textbooks, workbooks, and worksheets in teaching-learning situations.

Polson and Dillner[4] wrote the following in the use of basal materials in the reading curriculum:

Although the exact words used to teach reading and the amount and type presented at each level vary from publisher to publisher, several generalizations may be made about all basal reader series. (1) They usually consist of a sequence of books containing reading materials of increasing difficulty which teach all the reading skills in an orderly fashion. (2) The vocabulary used in creating stories in the series is carefully selected and limited to words in print which are thought to be already known to the children in listening or speaking situations, (3) The number of new words presented in each succeeding reading selection is carefully controled and based on the premise that children learn to read best through a planned continuum of introducing and maintaining vocabulary. (4) The number of words per sentence is carefully controlled. (5) Most of the stories in the series are primarily narrative in nature and based on concepts that are believed to be familiar to the child. (6) The series view themselves as capable of being a "total program" and as such consist of a great variety of sequenced, integrated components.

Why do essentialists lean heavily upon the use of basal materials in the curriculum?

1. essential understandings and skills can be attained effectively by students when stimuli are adequately delimited. Excessive use of audio-visual materials hinders learners in developing needed skills to read and understand abstract words.

2. abstract content contains its own sequential understandings and skills to be developed by pupils. Order in learning is deemphasized when a variety of concrete and semi-concrete materials are inserted into the reading curriculum.

3. the abstract words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs must be mastered by students in order that vital goals in reading are attained. Reading involves attaching meaning to the abstract and not to various audio-visual materials appearing in the environment.

4. learners individually must develop a <u>will</u> to learn to read the abstract. Interest is not the essential ingredient in learning to read; rather effort in mastering skills in reading is vital.

5. teachers, properly educated and trained, are in the best position to select objectives, learning activities, and appraisal procedures in an essentialist reading curriculum.

Issues involved in choosing learning opportunities in the reading curriculum involve the following:

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[4]Joanne P. Olson and Martha H. Dillner, <u>Learning to Teach Reading in the Elementary School</u>. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1976, page 78.

1. using a variety of activities in reading as compared to the rather complete use of basal readers and related abstract content. In using a multi-media approach, background information is provided for learners in an interesting way to aid in developing purposeful readers. In an essentialist reading curriculum, will to learn, not interest per se determines sequential ends, means, and appraisal procedures.

2. learners with teacher guidance sequencing their own learnings as compared to teachers effectively ordering reading opportunities for students.

3. providing for an activity centered versus a subject centered curriculum.

4. emphasizing concrete and semi-concrete experiences along with abstract reading materials versus ordered abstract learnings, in general, utilizing basal readers.

5. student input into the reading curriculum as compared to a teacher determined curriculum.

Appraising Learner Progress

How should student achievement in learning to read be appraised? Toward one end of the curriculum, learners with teacher guidance need to assess their own progress. Thus, after the completion in reading of a library book in individualized reading, a conference may be held involving the reader and the teacher. The learner himself/herself may determine means of appraisal, such as

1. drawing one or more illustrations pertaining to content read.

2. discussing main ideas in the reading selection.

3. developing an outline of sequential content inherent in the library book.

4. listing a specific number of vital facts gleaned in reading.

5. writing a different setting or plot for the library book.

Or, the learner and teacher cooperatively may ascertain evaluation procedures, such as:

1. developing different characters in the library book.

2. writing one or more poems directly related to content read.

3. pantomiming a portion of the book.

4. participating in a creative dramatics presentation with another student who has read the same library book.

Toward the other end of the continuum, the teacher may determine appraisal techniques for learners in reading. A teacher determined curriculum is then in evidence. The teacher might assign selected pages, a chapter, or chapters for pupils to read. After student have completed reading the selection, the teacher could:

1. select questions for the former to answer.

2. require learners to summarize orally or in writing what has been read.

3. have students list ten salient facts acquired from the reading.

4. assign play parts to be written from the reading selection.

5. write true-false, multiple choice, essay, matching, or completion items, for learners to respond to.

Ranson[5] wrote:

> As for actual teaching, there are several points of view as to what works best. In some schools (especially in upper grades), teachers have assumed that independent practice--without instruction--will produce optimal reading improvement in students. In others, teachers have operated on the assumption that they must teach directly for every step in the learning process. But at the Ransom schools, we have found that a combination of these approaches is best; the teacher is needed to introduce new steps in reading progress and to re-explain lessons to children who have not understood them, but a student who is simply a passive observer of the teacher's activities will not fully absorb or know how to use what has been taught. He, too, must be an active participant in the learning process, both during teacher directed lessons and during independent reinforcement and enrichment activities. You therefore need to provide both instruction and opportunities for students to learn on their own.

Issues involved in appraising learner progress involves the following:

1. To what extent should the learner be involved as compared to the teacher in appraising the former's performance in reading?

2. Which techniques should be utilized to evaluate reading achievement? There are numerous means available such as teacher written tests, standardized tests, teacher observation, anecdotal statements, discussions, and oral reports, among others.

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[5]Grayce A. Ransom, Preparing To Teach Reading. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1978, pages 200 and 201.

In Closing

There are numerous issues involved in evaluating the reading curriculum. These include:

1. Who should select objectives in the reading curriculum?

2. How should learnings be sequenced for pupils?

3. Which appraisal procedures should be utilized to ascertain reading progress of learners?

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